



Dahl Memorial Clinic
Municipality of Skagway

May 18, 2017

Chairman Ajit Pai
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai and FCC Commissioners:

Thank you for your support of the Rural Health Care Program. As you recognized in a recent Senate Commerce Committee FCC Oversight hearing, broadband telemedicine is a critical component of addressing the health care needs of Alaskans.

Telemedicine has allowed us to dramatically improve access to care, accelerate diagnosis and treatment, avoid unnecessary medivacs and expand local treatment options. It has also helped reduce Medicaid costs.

The connection provided with this funding has insured vastly improved speeds and reliability that locally provided services cannot. Given our remote location, without this funding, our only option for connectivity would be limited to one vendor and no access to healthcare specific services that our current connection provides, such as Quality of Service for video conferencing, and synchronous connection speeds for sending and receiving of radiology images. Our connection has allowed us to have unfettered and unlimited access to remote services without increasing our unbudgeted service costs.

However, the current \$400 million Rural Health Care Universal Service Support budget remains at the initial level set in 1997, despite inflation, advances in technology, and increased demand for services. The Universal Service Administrative Co. also recently announced that it exceeded the funding cap for the current 2016 fiscal year ending June 30, 2017. Applicants that filed during the Sept. 1 – Nov. 30, 2016 filing window will receive a pro-rated percentage, 92.5 percent, of the qualifying funding requested. In our case, that means we will be responsible for paying an additional \$9,600, which we did not budget or anticipate, in addition to the portion of the cost of services that we are already responsible for paying under the rules of the rural health care support mechanism.

We ask that you take steps to ensure both the near and long-term viability of the Rural Health Care Program to meet the increased demand for telemedicine services both in Alaska and across the country. We believe that the FCC should increase the budget for the rural health care support mechanisms to reflect inflation over the past two decades, as well as increased technology and telecommunications demands due to our HIPAA legal obligations, advances in telemedicine capabilities, changes in patient expectations and standards of care, and new demands from skilled nursing facilities.

In addition, please consider implementing an inflation adjustment mechanism for the future, and short-term measures to restore qualifying funding requests filed Sept. 1 – Nov. 30, 2016 to 100 percent.

Thank you for your support of this important program.

Sincerely,



Michelle O'Boyle

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cc: The Honorable Senator Murkowski
The Honorable Senator Sullivan
The Honorable Congressman Young